

Above a Pedestrian: A William Faulkner Tribute

“I might not be a driver yet, but I’m a skater: now that’s two steps above a pedestrian.”

He said it as if the distance, the inch or so separating the soles of his feet from the pavement which his wheels ground into subjugation, served in some way to buttress him against that amorphous and ubiquitous pity. The comrade sat three feet removed from him, but perhaps closer in spirit than the confessor’s brother had ever been.

The comrade (Mitchell Joseph), notwithstanding the presence of a futon—beaten by the force of collapsing bodies within an inch of its life; since every useful item in a household that has come to radiate the family’s ambiance possesses a lifetime in the same way that an inert element can possess a half-life—in the dust-glazed living room, knelt in a ceremonious manner before the confessor (Blake Anderson).

“Just tell it like you remember it, hey?”

“It is in my blood to be a U.S. Army Ranger, y’hear? In by blood!” Mitchell nodded solemnly, all the while he thinking *Oh, Lord. Here we go again! Not that beginning! Again with the in-my-blood talk!*

The infamous *in-my-blood talk*, which had infected the air with an effluvium of haughtiness, now stoking the flames of “He said” and “She said” among a family reunion already embattled in controversy, now inviting—though unwittingly—a chuckle from eavesdroppers in public, now provoking Juarez to employ one of those signature threats that seemed to sit snugly, purposefully, nestled in the crevices of his grey matter like so many arrows in a quiver.

“I might not be a driver yet——”

“All right!” said Mitchell. “You just said that!”

“Said what?” Blake asked no more; not aloud. The not-saids churned beneath the surface of the confessor’s psyche: a Janus-faced torrent of *Who does he think he is? Who in the Nine Realms does Juarez think he is with his clunker truck collection and his cholo vampire—(But a true future ranger would have been prepared)—Are you challenging the blood?—(No. Maybe there’s just not enough of it yet)—Right. Maybe when I have the feet to fill pap’s combat boots, and the chest and arms to fill his BDUs—(Yeah!)—Well that settles it.*

“Well that settles it,” said Blake. “Juarez is a worthy opponent, to be sure, but my blood will overcome him yet!”

The confessor grinned, exhibiting that selfsame swagger that had tainted the family reunions (“in my blood!”) and spawned the public embarrassments (“in my blood!”) and caused encounters with neighbors and with *their* various strains of blood. And the comrade:

“What does any of this have to do with Mr. Juarez?”

“Agh! Sar’n Rexton won’t let me hear the end of it!” Said Blake.

“You think Rexton’ll turn you down over a goose egg?”

“It’s an officer thing, Mitch!”

“But you’re not even——”

“*Future!* It’s an officer *and future officer* thing, Mitch: and I wouldn’t expect you to get it!”

It had been a spring of shrubbery when Blake first ventured into the office and encountered the recruiter——that Sergeant Rexton : a man blunt and hard-boiled and honest as the day is long (provided it is a December day). He waxing eloquent: “Come on in, son. Set yourself down. If you could just fill out some basic information . . . Hey! My uncle lived in that

neighborhood once! He had to move out after a wild coyot' ate his cat! Enough about his past, though. Let's talk about your future. How would you like to be a hero for God and country? Huh? You were born with what? Aw! Don't sweat it; I'm sure we can get you a waiver for it. You *do* wanna make your pa proud, don't ya? A'right. You think about it. Go home and think about how you can do right by your bloodline."

Juarez had not been impressed to hear of it. The not-yet-confessor felt no great physical intimidation from him (he being a fellow of that soft definition of jawline and chin which will one day require a mountaineer's beard (both to conceal the features and to remind onlookers that they had once existed before their dissolution into a singular, cylindrical mass of putty) paired with an almost childlike physique which prompted, not pity (Pity would have been the last item on any self-respecting Chicano's list of desirable accolades.) but a type of delicacy with which the adults conducted conversation with the neighbor), only the inexplicable aversion to proximity that repels the apex predators of the rainforest from brightly-colored frogs.

"Move your ruckus somewhere else ... or I'll sic my pet Chupacabra'n yeh!" the neighbor had said when occasion permitted it.

"And that's exactly what he did tonight, Mitch!" said Blake.

"Wait just a minute. You're telling me that that neighbor, who never follows through with what he says he's gonna do (for good or bad), but always surprises the *barrio* with some decision straight outta left field;—this neighbor not only kept his word for a change, but made good on a threat that he'd have to defy the laws of nature for?"

"Yes!"

"You're telling me that this thing (lizard-dog-demon) chased you for two blocks until you reached the Edgars'——"

“The Morrisons’,” said the confessor.

“You reached the Morrisons’ house, but the board had a little farther to go, didn’t it? It must’ve gone all the way to the intersection at the bottom of the hill (where Dr. Lee keeps his boat (Since its always on top of that trailer and never in water, though, I think of it as a giant, boat-shaped boxcar just waiting to roll into the street.) and that old jalopy on cinderblocks) and been torn to shreds by a painters’ van or something.”

“Sounds about right. That sounds like what I remember of it,” he said.

“Well, I still say you’re not remembering straight if you thought that the animal was a Chupacabra and not some kind of mutt.”

“I say you’d have to be there,” said Blake (“And an officer or future officer,” he added after some time, after the duration of the conversation had run its course without his realizing it.) before drifting into a state not unlike sleep, but without its inherent rejuvenation.

A shadow, softly defined in jawline, glided across the partially translucent shutters. No sooner did the *wrap! wrap! wrap!* upon the door sound than Mitchell’s morbid curiosity drew him toward the peephole. The neighbor and the splintered board and blue blazes and red blazes met the eyes of the comrade all at once in a flurry of realization and deeper consternation. He opened the door.

“Cops?”

“No. EMT,” said the neighbor. He (Juarez) held out the token of Blake’s splintered pride, a kind of contraband from the make-believe war with a creature simultaneously more and less imposing than the shedding of denial. “You might wanna take this.” Mitchell the comrade, now bereaved midwife, cradled the miscarried half-boards.

“Your pet—?”

“Ain’t got no pet, *chico*.”

The medics wasted no time, now questioning, now escorting the would-be self-resurrector from the mouth of the abode, that living room of evening recalibration, the man-cave and son-of-man-cave that Mr. Joseph had purchased at the price of his labor.

“Kid’ll be fine,” said Juarez. The comrade, demanding justification for the levity with which the neighbor spoke:

“You really think so, hey?”

“He’s not the kinda guy who stays down when he’s knocked down. It’s . . . it’s just in his blood, y’know?”